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ABSTRACT

The "pining" for a sense of community, for roots, for a connectedness to others is a basic need that is felt but not understood, that is desired but not practiced, in either college settings or the greater society. Thus, the prevalent rootlessness and transience that students arrive with at college (due to a highly mobile society) is never overcome on college campuses because colleges do not practice what they preach. In reality, little is understood about the dynamics of community and the development of a sense of community is actually inhibited through the policies and procedures of institutions of higher education. Students arrive without an understanding of, or first hand experience with, a functional community and never experience anything to the contrary. Four doctoral students combined knowledge, resources, and interests to develop a model for reclaiming community on the nation's campuses as a student project. The end result, a project called "The Future Residential Community," has become the basis for further research into what the components of community are; how they can be implemented; and how a vision that does not have roots in tighter controls, restrictions, and regulations can be demonstrated to all constituencies of higher education. Colleges and universities must begin lessening distinctions such as those implied in viewing students' lives as separate and unintegrated and categorizing them as either inside or outside the classroom. The same philosophy must be applied to distinctions between faculty, administrators, and staff. It is also logical that intentional communities outside higher education be experienced and studied, that the rich history of communal movements be drawn upon, and that model communities from Trappist monasteries to agricultural communes be explored. (ABL)

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A PRACTITIONER'S GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY

SOUTHERN FUTURIST CONFERENCE 1990

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PART I. INTRODUCTION

In The Acquisitive Society, R. H. Tawney (1973), says that the social order of all communities is built upon principles individuals may choose to accept. However, such principles are only the standards by which community members measure their thoughts, decisions, and actions. And, if a community is to be successful, it must have principles that have been collaboratively agreed upon. Only then can there be a shared vision that connects thoughts with actions. "And as their minds are, so in the long run and with exceptions, their practical activity will be" (p 262).

Ernest Boyer (1990) in his work, Campus Life: In Search Of Community, has identified two distinct needs in higher education today: first, the need to begin a national dialogue on community-building; and second, the need to challenge higher education to define its role in finding ways to build and strengthen the campus community, and hopefully, the society at large. For several years now, the authors have shared Dr. Boyer's concerns, as have other higher education administrators. Now, armed with the legitamacy that the Carnegie Foundation and Boyer's name provides, we are ready to take these ideas a step further, and as Tawney, wrote, begin to merge thought (principle) with action (duty). In sum, to add "community practitioners" to our responsibilities.

As student development practitioners we are well aware of the deep rooted problems of dysfunctional individuals, and the cultural ills that Boyer has identified and injected into the national dialogue. We are all deeply concerned about such issues and are at the same time confused about possible solutions. However, the distinction about these familiar issues is that they are a part of the social fabric of college campuses that historically have been a world unto themselves, cordoned off from outside realities. If we believe that the "ivory towers" came down with student movements of the Sixties, we are certainly unprepared for today's realization that the walls have begun to crumble once again. For today, the most intense societal problems are no longer left outside at the doorstep of the Academy.

As for the causes for this current state of affairs, we do not purport to know. We approach these issues from our perspective as student personnel professionals well-versed in issues of college residential settings. While the causes are multi-variate it appears to us that young people arrive at the doorsteps of our nation's colleges and universities

without prior experience within a functional community. This situation is complicated by our inabilities and shortcomings as a result of an ignorance of the far-reaching impact of rootlessness that infiltrates our lives.

The "pining" for a sense of community, for roots, for a connectedness to others is a basic need that is felt but not understood, that is desired but not practiced, in either college settings or the greater society. Thus, we believe that the prevalent rootlessness and transience that students arrive with at college (due to a highly mobile society) is never overcome on college campuses because we do not practice what we preach. In reality, we understand little about the dynamics of community and actually inhibit its development through our policies and procedures. Thus, we have a situation where individuals arrive without the understanding of, or first-hand experience with, a functional community and never experience anything to the contrary.

Some eighteen years ago in A Nation of Strangers, Vance Packard (1972) referred to colleges and universities as "breeding grounds for transients." Few can deny Packard's assertion when examining the highly mobile college culture: undergraduates moving away to attend college, then moving at least twice a year (shuttling between home and campus); the "necessity" for the diploma-mill mentality; the graduate school world that discourages advanced study at one's alma mater; post-master's work at yet another institution; and then any number of moves in one's professional career. Thus, the irony is that the very institution which expects or hopes to instill a feeling of connectedness heavily contributes to the rootlessness problem.

This condition is actively being researched today as evidenced by the national discussion on liberal arts curriculum reform that has expanded to all facets of higher education. The debate has moved from arguments over specific course requirements to discussions on what comprises a "quality" education. The ensuing discourse has ironically facilitated the fragmentation of the curricular and the cocurricular foundations of the university, pitting academic "experts" against their administrative counterparts creating an environment of " . . . conflicting priorities and competing interests [that] diminish the intellectual and social quality of the undergraduate experience . . ." (p. 2), as recognized by Boyer (1987). Such disharmony not only inhibits a "community of learners," it fosters an environment of open conflict and strife through finger-pointing and name-calling.

Therefore, if we are going to affect change we must address the

problems from within, that is, we as colleagues -- administrators and faculty alike -- must create the new foundation on which the undergraduate experience can be rebuilt. The purpose of our presentation is to not stop at rhetoric but proceed to identify visions and models that can be implemented as alternatives to the current malaise.

We take the liberty to assume that most educators would agree with J. Glenn Gray, cited in Orr, (1988), who sees the purpose of a liberal education to be the development of the whole person as "one who has fully grasped the simple fact that his self is fully implicated in those beings around him . . . and who has learned to care deeply about them" (pp. 4-5). Or, as David Orr (1988), co-founder of "Meadowcreek", a sustainable agricultural community, states, the function of education should be "the development of the individual's capacity for clear thought and compassion in the recognition of the interrelatedness of life" (p. 5). Finally, Boyer (1987) assumes that because of our democratic way of life, our survival as a people is dependent upon "whether we can move beyond self-interest and begin to understand better the realities of our dependence on each other" (p. 8).

Like Ernest L. Boyer (1987), we proceed, then, with a conviction that a balance can be struck between individual interest and shared concerns, in the development of a strong learning community. One hundred and fifty years ago, de Tocqueville (1987) observed, we must find a common ground that integrates both the public and private life, since radical individualism is a threat to our very freedom. Therefore, our community of learning may become a model that enhances rather than detracts from the society as a whole and contributes to the resolution of the problems that affect us all.

One final thought: we, the authors of this paper, share the conviction that student personel administrators must take the lead to generate collaborative solutions for the problems that have already been universally identified. We feel that the '90s are a pivotal decade in which must address the social ills that are so much a part of higher education today. We can provide the blueprint for reclaiming community on the nation's campuses and therefore become the the model by which the society measures itself, once again.

PART II SIMULATION

Our idea for this paper developed from a doctoral level course entitled, "The Future American College." During this class we discussed a wide diversity of issues that are present in today's society that impact on our daily lives within our institution of higher education. Although we

had numerous reading sources, our major texts were Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life, by Robert Bellah et al., (1985), and College The Undergraduate Experience in America, by Boyer (1987). At the end of the class the instructors assigned a paper that would be an "integrative experience," which represented our acquired knowledge and resulting practitioner application.

Four of us combined knowledge, resources and interests to develop a model for the future residential campus community. At our first meeting we began dissecting the project in a manner that would assign different responsibilities to group members, who in turn would work independently of one another. After we had completed our individual tasks, we were then to come back together and through a piece mill process, create a project that we would turn in as a group to receive credit. Fortunately, we realized that we were "creatures of habit" and were easily manipulated by our environment which is comfortable and safe because it is known. However, recognizing that "known" practices contribute to the current dilemma, we now accept that new approaches and visions are needed.

Starting again, we began collaboratively brainstorming ideas and strategies to not only complete our assignment, but to allow us the opportunity to apply our class discussions to our daily lives. It was important to create a method that would facilitate new experiences for the group that would foster a deeper understanding and shared appreciation among group members. The end result, our project, "The Future Residential Community" has become the basis for further research into what the components of community are; how they can be implemented, and how we can illustrate to all constituencies of higher education that a new vision must be adopted - a vision that does not have roots in tighter controls, restrictions, and regulations, but a vision that has roots based in collaborative learning and recognizes that interdependence is the foundation for the future success of higher education.

During the process we discovered that the paper became a teaching tool in itself; a tool that can be wielded with other groups of professionals to facilitate their understanding of community, through the simulation exercise which shares characteristics of community with group participants. Although brief, the simulation exercise may be the only community that they have experienced. Ironically, our original group found this to be the case, and to our surprise found that the method and the process that we used were just as important as the end result. K.A.

Bruffee (1987) described this experience appropriately in his article, "The Art of Collaborative Learning." Bruffee (1987) stated that this "marrying into" is clearly an informal variety of collaborative learning that challenges students to define themselves as interdependent members of the new community. (Copies of the original paper are available from the authors)

Part III Call for Action

THE NEW COMMUNITY OF SCHOLARS

Martin Luther King, Jr. (1983), once said, "All men are interdependent. Every nation is an heir of a vast treasury of ideas and labor to which both the living and the dead of all nations have contributed. Whether we realize it or not, each of us lives eternally 'in the red.' We are everlasting debtors to known and unknown men and women" (p. 18).

We use the term "interdependence" to refer to the condition of a group of individuals, "who have developed some significant commitment to 'rejoice together, mourn together,' and to ' delight in each other, [and] make others' conditions our own." Surely, Dr. King (1983) can be seen as the quintessential example of an individual's commitment to a universal community. Additionally, much like Robert Bellah's et al., (1985) "Community of Memory", King (1983) recognized the importance of integrating the visions and contributions of the past, present, and future.

Such an integrative philosophy characterizes what is needed in higher education today. The need for a new community of scholars is apparent as is a radical redefinition of "knowledge" itself: how it is created, and how it is shared.

William R. Whipple (1988), in his article "Collaborative Learning" defines current knowledge as the ". . . 'pouring' [of] facts from the teacher to the students as though they [the students] were glasses to be filled with some form of intellectual orange juice" (p.5). He further states that knowledge is an emergent feature of the social interaction among people that challenges the individual and the assumption that knowledge resides in the individual.

Recent books in higher education would lead one to conclude that the fragmentation of knowledge, as seen in the current emphasis on specialization, is segregating scholars and students alike producing what Bellah et al., terms "lifestyle enclaves"- groups of people who have common interest and ideas, but are not interdependent. Therefore it

appears to us that knowledge is a collaborative endeavor, that in its basic form, is created in the community, and thus must be transmitted in connected and integrative ways. Bruffee (1984) defines this as the "conversation of mankind", while Whipple (1988) adds that " . . . knowledge finds its home, and only through the unending evolution of that dialogue can it [knowledge] be recreated and refashioned into new forms that will enlighten the understanding of future generations" (p.5).

Likewise, colleges and universities must begin lessening the distinctions, such as separate and unintegrated lives, and categorization of its students as either inside or outside the classroom. The same philosophy must be applied for the distinctions between faculty, administrators, and staff. After all, is the biologist whose teaching inspires the student to study medicine any more important than the college counselor who cures the student's dysfunctional behavior that otherwise would keep that same individual from matriculating? No less important is the contribution that the custodian provides the student as a fulfillment of a basic need.

Students, faculty, staff, and their created knowledge are seen as organisms of a larger, common body. This view of higher education, as described throughout this paper, defines the new community of scholars that serves as the foundation for the new vision of higher education; a vision that utilizes "connected knowledge" as a daily tool for interdependent living in a 'community of imagination accountable to the universal', as described by Susan D. Welch (1985), in her book, Communities of Resistance and Solidarity: A Feminist Theology of Liberation.

THE FIRST STEP

As explained in the initial project paper (see Appendix), the process of writing was found to be as important as the finished product. In that, we discovered the value and the significance of collaborative learning in the truest sense of the word. This paper, as well as the initial project, has been composed from the shared knowledge, research, and discoveries of its authors. This paper represents an achievement that could not have been reached individually. It is not a collection of fragmented, individually-authored segments. Rather, it represents an integrative approach to learning that we contend is one of the essential building blocks for future models of learning communities.

From the mere fulfillment of a course project, an idea on how to get at the root of the practical application of student development theory

integrated with liberal education philosophy emerged. We have experienced the potential of true "connected knowing." Again, the journey is as rewarding as any possible destination. This endeavor has truly been motivational, inspirational, and developmental -- because of the chosen process-- an experience whose occurrence in higher education is all to infrequent. This is precisely one of the major points that we make: that knowledge is best achieved communally, interdependence is achievable, and that collaborative learning is a "lesson in itself"! This is the essence of community.

Continuing this integrative approach, it is logical that we experience and study intentional communities outside higher education. The United States has a rich history of communal movements that can add to the understanding of how college residential communities can be revived. In addition, there exist today a plethora of working experiments from which additional knowledge can be gathered. Model communities as diverse as a Trappist Monastery and a sustainable agricultural commune have provided us with the opportunity to see communities of imagination and action. Such experiences and ongoing research will be basis for a possible collaborative dissertation. The author's feel that this is the natural outcome in our attempt to apply our acquired knowledge as practitioner's of community development in the 21st century.

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